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Status of tribal women with special reference to challenges faced in governance

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Abstract

The objective of this paper was to examine the socio-economic and socio-personal status of tribal women and also focusing on the challenges faced by them in governance. The research was based on primary data. Data was collected through field visit of Maniadih village in Samastipur district of Bihar state with the help of an interview schedule. The study covers total 50 tribal women beneficiaries as sample size. The share of tribal women in governance were very few. Through this research paper, we see tribal women had access to the outside world. There had been a growing recognition of the need to include tribal women in governance and ensure their active participation that effect their lives. Despite of all these, several challenges persist that hinders their participation in governance. After having interaction with the tribal women and complete understanding of the study area, the researcher was drafting an interview schedule to capture various aspects related to this study.

Keywords: Tribal women, socio-economic and socio-personal status, challenges, governance

Introduction

Tribals are popularly known as a symbol of self-assertion. They are primarily found in Central India and few regions of the North-East. As per the data of census 2001, total population of Scheduled Tribes constitutes 8.2% of the total population of the country. Most of the Scheduled tribe people lives in rural areas and their population comprise 10.4% of the total rural population of the country. According to International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences "Tribe" is taken to denote a primary aggregate of people living in a primitive or barbarous condition under a headman or chief. Primarily based on the responsibilities they play in society; one can assess the status of tribal women. Chowdhuri conducted a study in 1988 and reveals that the socio – economic condition of the Scheduled tribe women in West Bengal in a comparative setting with scheduled caste and non-scheduled women. The main findings were that only 5.01 percent of Scheduled Tribe females were noted as literate in comparison to Scheduled Caste women who were 13.70 percent and non-scheduled population was 37.43 percent. This level was quite low as compared to the overall rate of females who are literate. A study conducted by Singh and Rajyalaxmi in 1993 and reported that the status of tribal women in terms of their demography, health, education and employment have been discussed. Since independence, various protections have been given to the tribal population by the Constitution of India. The study highlighted some aspects of tribal work, tribal women work equally with their male counterparts with lower pay, sexual exploitation. Tribal women don't have property rights, they have lower literacy rate than scheduled caste and general population. Tribal women are not healthy and suffer from malnutrition and various diseases. The study highlighted the need to improve the status of tribal girl, to bring about change in the status of tribal woman. In India, tribal women had no influence on politics. In the village councils, they belonged nowhere. They were never given a voice in the panchayats. Even so, very few tribal women are involved in governance. Vikas Nandal conducted a study on "Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and reported that Women constitute about half of the population of the world, but their role in politics is insignificant as compared to that of men. A liberal democratic country cannot make progress if potentials of half of its strength are centralized in the household affairs only. After a while, tribal women begin to participate in all forms of governance-related activities, however they do not have as much power in these areas as their male counterparts. Without their active engagement in all facets of society, progress

cannot occur. Very few tribal women are involved in governance. Very few have succeeded in securing powerful positions. Dr. S. Nagaraja (2017) ^[9] in his study revealed that tribal women should get greater political and social participation so they can be dynamic active politics. If they are provided the opportunity to take active participation in politics, they will contribute a lot to the development of their regions. The process of tribal women empowerment will start with the active participation in politics. There was negative impact of patriarchy on political participation of tribal women. After 75 years of India's independence, the position of tribal women has very slowly improved. To know and understand the status of tribal women in society, an examination of their governance role is mandatory. The socio-economic and cultural status are intertwined with political engagement and status and this relationship has the capacity to affect and change the nation's political and socio-economic structure. It has now been accepted that women's right to vote and to occupy active involvement in governance is fundamental to women's status.

They have acquired political influence and recognition. The voices of tribal women need to be amplified locally, nationally, regionally and even internationally. Over the past several years, there has been a growing to include tribal women in governance and ensure their active participation that effect their lives. Their participation in governance promotes gender equality, opens up new viewpoints and reinforces democratic values. John Friedman (1992) ^[4] presumed in his study that the inclusion of Scheduled Tribe women in the political order of local governance needs special emphasis. It is often presumed that the problem of women's political participation is one of exclusion and representation by itself would solve the problem. Governments, Non-governmental organizations and international bodies are increasingly recognising the value of engagement of tribal women in governance. Numerous initiatives have been made to create platforms for their active engagement so they may offer their distinctive viewpoints on the creation and application of policy. These initiatives help tribal women develop their leadership skills and capabilities. Despite all these, several challenges persist that hinders the participation of tribal women in governance. Empowering tribal women in governance is not only a matter of justice and human rights but also a key driven for sustainable development. Acknowledging and valuing their contribution is crucial for fostering inclusive and resilient societies where the voices of tribal women being heard, respected and acted upon.

Objective of the study

In the light of the aforementioned observations, the article critically sets the following objectives

- To study the socio-economic and socio-personal status of tribal women.
- To elucidate the challenges faced by tribal women in governance.

Materials and Methods

Selection of area

The study was conducted in Maniadih village at Samastipur district of Bihar state. Bihar is the first state to constitute a commission to study the status of tribal communities and suggest ways to uplift them.

Selection of sample

For the present study, total 50 tribal women beneficiaries were randomly selected. All these tribal women beneficiaries were chosen as target respondents to get information about the aforementioned objectives of the study.

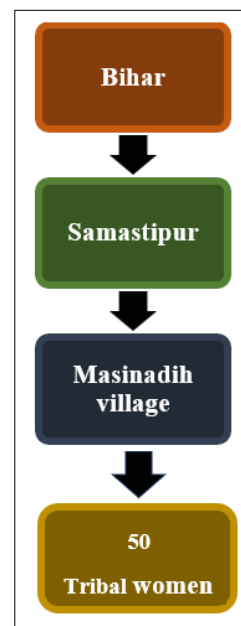


Fig 1: Samples framework

Collection of data

An interview schedule was formulated to elicit information regarding socio-economic and socio-personal status of tribal women. The questionnaire consists of questions focusing on the challenges faced by them in governance. As for this study, primary data was collected through the field visit of Maniadih village from all the tribal women who were become the part of this study. Since a successful study would depend only upon getting the maximum amount of information from the tribal women beneficiaries, hence the questionnaire was formulated with the same intention so as to bring out maximum information from the target beneficiaries without sounding their sentiments and confidentiality. Their responses had been kept strictly confidential. The questionnaire consists of numerous questions to meet the objectives of the study and the answers had been carefully recorded for a successful and valid research work. The result thus obtained was then analysed and processed in the form of tables.

Results and Discussions

Socio-economic and socio-personal status of tribal women

Socio-economic and socio-personal status are the essential factors that determine their social identity. The data collected is shown below in the table 1:

The findings of the table 1 revealed that the most of the tribal women (60%) belonged to the middle age group between 31-50 years. All tribal women (100%) belonged to the tribal communities. The educational factor revealed that most of the tribal women (50%) received education above high school. Educational status is an important indicator of development among tribal women. Further, most of the tribal women (80%) were married. Most of the tribal women (80%) were from Hindu religion. Most of the tribal women (60%) lived in joint family which indicates that their family system was united and were close to each other. Large family size (70%)

had been observed.

Regarding the socio-economic status of the tribal women, it was observed that there were more than two income earners (50%) in the family. Most of the members in the family of tribal women (50%) were involved in agricultural activities

where few of them were self-employed. It is observed from the table that most of the tribal families (70%) had their own land. Most of the tribal families (80%) had their own house. Furthermore, most of the tribal women (70%) belonged to the member of one organization.

Table 1: Socio-economic and socio-personal status of tribal women

Particulars	Number of tribal women beneficiaries	Percentage
Age		
Young (Up to 30)	5	10%
Middle (31-50)	30	60%
Old (Above 50)	15	30%
Caste		
Unreserved	–	–
Other backward class (OBCs)	–	–
Tribes	50	100%
Educational status		
Illiterate	–	–
Primary school	–	–
Middle school	5	10%
High school	20	40%
And above	25	50%
Marital Status		
Unmarried	–	–
Married	40	80%
Widow	10	20%
Divorced	–	–
Religion		
Hindu	40	80%
Muslim	10	20%
Family Type		
Nuclear	20	40%
Joint	30	60%
Family Size		
Up to 5	15	30%
More than 5	35	70%
Income earners in family		
One	10	20%
Two	15	30%
More than two	25	50%
Family Occupation		
Unemployed	–	–
Self-employed	10	20%
Farmers	25	50%
Labourers	10	20%
Others	5	10%
Agricultural land owner		
Yes	35	70%
No	15	30%
Possession of house		
Own	40	80%
Rented	10	20%
Social participation		
Not member of any organization	15	30%
Member of one organization	35	70%
Member of more than One organization	–	–

Source: Field survey

Challenges faced by tribal women in Governance

Tribal women face several challenges in governance, often stemming from deep-rooted social, cultural, and economic factors that hinders their participation in governance. They have made themselves heard and visible politically. There is a need to reinforce voices of tribal women locally, nationally, regionally and even globally. There has been a growing

recognition of the need to include tribal women in governance and ensure their active participation that effect their lives. Their inclusion in governance brings different perspectives, enhances gender equality and strengthens democratic practices. While the specific challenges may vary across different tribal communities and regions, some of them are:

Table 2: Challenges faced by tribal women in Governance

Challenges	Number of tribal women beneficiaries	Percentage
Cultural barriers and stereotypes	35	70%
Gender discrimination	38	76%
Limited access to education	15	30%
Economical barriers	20	40%
Lack of representation	33	66%
Lack of awareness and information	25	50%
Infrastructure and geographical barriers	20	40%
Social and political exclusion	28	56%
Patriarchal traditions	40	80%

Source: Field survey

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including initiatives to promote education, raise awareness and information, increase women's representation in governance structures and challenge gender stereotypes within tribal communities. The above Table 2 elicits information on the challenges faced by tribal women in governance. It is observed from the responses of tribal women that most of the tribal women (80%) had experienced patriarchal traditions as challenges that restrict their participation in governance activities whereas maximum tribal women (76%) had experienced the problem of gender discrimination that limit their opportunities to participate in governance. Cultural norms and stereotypes (70%) also reinforce their roles, constraining their involvement in governance and making it difficult for them to assert their rights and interests. They had underrepresented in governance structures. This lack of representation (66%) marginalized their voice and perspectives in governance. Some of them

(56%) may face exclusion from governance processes that prevents them from actively participating in governance at higher levels. Some of them (50%) may have lack of awareness and information that hinders their ability to participate actively in governance and advocate for their needs and priorities. Few of them (20%) often face economical barriers and infrastructural and geographical barrier as challenges that making it difficult for them to engage in governance activities. Tribal women may had limited financial independence and were often located in remote areas with limited infrastructural facilities. Poor transportation, lack of communication networks and inadequate public services can make it challenging for tribal women to access governance structures or participate in governance processes. Very few of them (30%) had experienced limited education as challenges that hinders their effective participation in governance activities.

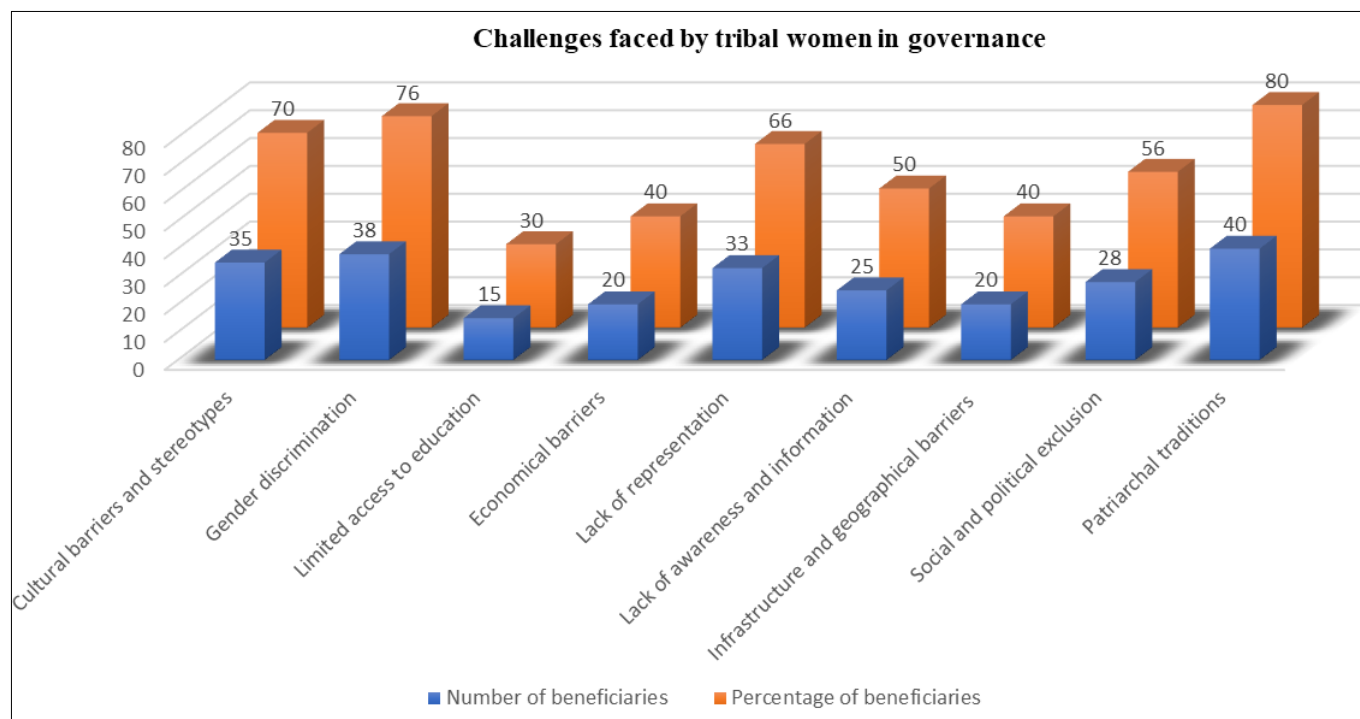


Fig 2: Challenges faced by tribal women in Governance

Success stories

Case I: Draupadi Murmu, India's youngest President

Draupadi Murmu was born into a Santali family on June 30, 1958, in the village of Baidaposi in the Odia district of Mayurbhanj. She comes from a tribal community and started her career as a teacher. In 1997, she became a member of the BJP and was chosen to serve as a counselor for the Rairangpur Nagar Panchayat and then again was elected in 2000. She served as the Minister of state with independent charge for commerce and transportation under the BJP and Biju Janata Dal Coalition administration in Odisha from March 6, 2000 to August 6, 2002. She was chosen to lead the BJP in Mayurbhanj as both state and district president of the schedule tribe morcha from 2006 and 2009. In 2015, she took the oath of office as the first female governor of Jharkhand and served till 2021. She was the first tribal leader and women from the Odia tribe to be appointed governor of an Indian state. In 2022, she holds the distinction of being India's first tribal President and the second women to hold the office and also being the youngest President till date.

Case-II: Jhalkari Bai

Jhalkari Bai is a legendary figure who played a significant role in India's history. She was a Dalit woman belonging to the tribal community of Bundelkhand, U.P. Jhalkari Bai actively participated in the Indian rebellion of 1857 against British colonial rule. She disguised herself as Rani Lakshmbai, the queen of the princely state of Jhansi and fought valiantly in the battlefield.

Case-III: Phulo Murmu

Phulo Murmu, a tribal woman from the Santhal Community in Jharkhand, became the first women to be elected as the speaker of the Jharkhand legislative assembly in 2019. Her election to this prestigious position was seen as a significant milestone for tribal women in governance.

Conclusions

The study focused on the status of tribal women with special reference to challenges faced in governance. The findings of the study underscored the socio-economic and socio-personal status of tribal women. Tribal women faced several challenges in governance. They start taking participation in governance but they had not much control on such matter as their male counterparts. Their share in governance was very few. There had been a growing recognition of the need to include them in governance and ensure their active participation. There is a need to change the mindset of society towards patriarchal traditions. This change is crucial to achieve a more equitable and inclusive society. There is a need to promote gender equality, promoting political representation of tribal women, creating inclusive infrastructure and challenging cultural norms and stereotypes that perpetuate their participation. Empowering tribal women to face these challenges and take active participation in governance can foster social justice and sustainable development of society where the voices of tribal women being heard, respected and acted upon.

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